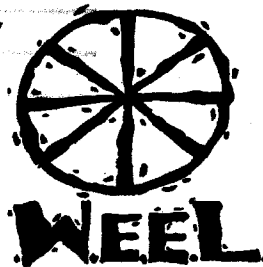


EXHIBIT 4  
DATE 4-2-07  
SB 22



To: House Appropriations  
From: WEEL – Olivia Riutta – [oriutta@weelempowers.org](mailto:oriutta@weelempowers.org), 406.495.0497.  
Date: April 5, 2007  
Re: SB 22 – Increase CHIP Eligibility to 175% of FPL

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am here today as a representative of WEEL. We are made up of low-income Montana families.

Currently in Montana there are 37,000 uninsured children – one in every six kids. We are unique in that, our uninsured rates among our kids have actually increased while the rest of the country has held steady. Over 75% of the uninsured kids come from families where at least one parent works. Families in Montana cannot afford health insurance for their children because it is not offered through their employer, or the plan offered is unaffordable.

As insurance rates increase, businesses are paying more, but are also cost shifting to employees. Nationally, only 47% of modest income earners are offered employer sponsored health insurance (\$40,000 for a family of four), compared to 78% of higher income earners.

Over 35% of Montanans work at a business with fewer than ten employees, these are small businesses that can't afford such drastic increases in premiums. Over 75% of MT firms that do not offer health insurance cite cost as the main obstacle. If children can be covered by CHIP, the precious health care dollars in MT businesses can be allocated to adults.

CHIP is a smart investment not only because it draws down four federal dollars for each state dollar invested, but it provides primary and preventive care at a time when it is least costly. Uninsured kids have unmet health needs: less than half (46%) of uninsured children had a well-child visit in the last year. Uninsured kids are nearly five times more likely to have at least one unmet health care need, compared to children with health insurance.

And we can no longer use fear of Federal CHIP reauthorization as a reason to stall CHIP expansion of eligibility. Just two weeks ago the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Baucus, passed its Fiscal Year 2008 budget resolution which included \$50 billion for CHIP over the next five years. Even the President of the US has stated that his bottom line for CHIP is 200% of poverty. The language of the bill is permissive, if the federal match is not there, then we don't expand. We cannot tie our hands for two more years by not expanding CHIP eligibility and denying ourselves a 4 to 1 federal match.

CHIP is also overwhelmingly supported by Montanans. This is the will of your constituents and a great step toward investment in Montana's future.

I urge a due pass on SB 22.

Thank you,

Olivia Riutta